

Scholars and Literati at the University of Pavia (1361–1800)

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This note summarizes our research into the group of scholars and literati who were at the University of Pavia until 1800, or were connected with it.

1 SOURCES

In drawing up the list of the teaching faculty at the University of Pavia, several sources were used. We consulted "Memorie e documenti per la storia dell'università di Pavia" as the main source (1878). This book contains the list of professors and rectors of the university from 1374 to 1877. The work, which provides the names of the professors and a wealth of information about them and their teaching, is based on "Syllabus lectorum studii ticinensis" by Giacomo Parodi, a three-volume work written in the 18th century whose information is derived from primary sources now largely lost. The book by Sangiorgio, "Historical Notes on the Two Universities of Pavia and Milan," provided additional information (1831) and so did the "Codice diplomatico" edited by Maiocchi (Maiocchi 1905). Consulting the Treccani Encyclopedia ultimately made it possible to verify and complete information.

2 THE UNIVERSITY

In 825, there existed in Pavia a school of law, rhetoric, and liberal arts created by Emperor Lothair I. It was not until 1361, thanks to the will of Galeazzo II Visconti, signore (lord) of Milan, that it became a *studium generale*, first by imperial decree of Charles IV, then in 1389 by papal bull of Boniface IX. Galeazzo wanted the *studio* to repopulate the city of Pavia, which had been almost deserted due to the black death. He granted privileges and protectionism for faculty and students to encourage them to come to the city. For several decades, the University of Pavia experienced a flourishing period, with professors and students coming from other Italian and European states (Mantovani 2011).

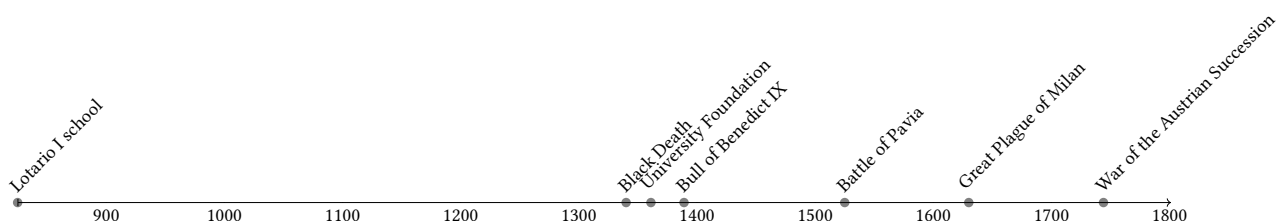


Figure 1: Timeline of the University of Pavia

The Battle of Pavia, which pitted the French army of Francis I against the imperial army of Charles V, marked the beginning of the university's decline. The waves of plague that ravaged all of northern Italy (St. Charles plague of 1576 and the plague of 1630) further halted the splendor of the University of Pavia. The revival of the university took place in the second half of the 18th

century, thanks to the Austrian rulers. In particular, Maria Theresa of Austria brought significant reforms to the educational system of the time (she made elementary school compulsory and free of charge, and reorganized university courses of study) and, thanks to important funding, allowed the establishment of the anatomical school of Pavia and the hiring of major scholars. Her policy aimed at making the University of Pavia the "Central School of the State" (Holy Roman Empire).

3 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table 1 displays descriptive statistics. Overall, we link 1,822 scholars to the University of Pavia, thus confirming it as one of the top five universities in Europe for the number of scholars. We observe the places of birth for more than 80% of them.

The median distance between places of birth and activity remains very small from its founding to the first half of the 18th century. This can be explained by the fact that professors and students were forced to stay in Pavia if they did not want to lose the privileges granted to them. The distance increases only in the last period.

The coverage of scholars in Wikipedia and Worldcat is low. Again, only in the last period is there a fair amount of coverage. This can be explained by Maria Theresa of Austria's desire to attract the best scholars of the time to the University of Pavia, or at least some published scholars.

Period	nb. obs	birth date	known place	mean age at appoint.	mean age at death	med. dist. birth-univ.	with Wiki.	with Worldcat
1200–1347	2	100%	100%		72.5	106	100%	100%
1348–1449	516	8.5%	90.7%	35	68.9	32	5.8%	8.5%
1450–1526	577	10.4%	84.2%	35.3	62.6	32	6.4%	12%
1527–1617	367	16.1%	81.5%	37	63.5	32	7.4%	19.3%
1618–1685	162	8.6%	87.7%	41.7	62	32	4.3%	10.5%
1686–1733	96	11.5 %	92.7%	35.8	69.4	32	1%	6.2%
1734–1800	102	57.8%	92.2%	35	69.9	90	34.3%	53.9%
1200–1800	1822	13.7%	86.7%	36	66.1	32	7.6%	14.5%

Table 1: Summary statistics by period

4 FIELDS

Figure 2 shows the distribution of disciplines at the University of Pavia considering professors who published. We can observe that humanities, medicine, and law were the most important disciplines.

5 PLACE OF BIRTH

Figure 3 displays the documented birthplaces of the scholars active at the University of Pavia by period.

In general, we observe that the professors at the University of Pavia came mainly from the Italian peninsula. As for the foreign professors, although the number is not very large, their origin follows the successive foreign dominations in this region. In the early period, the university attracted many scholars mainly from the territories of the Holy Roman Empire, to which Pavia belonged. Later, the presence of the French and Spanish favored the arrival of professors from these countries. In the last period, under the rule of Maria Theresa of Austria, the places of origin of the professors shifted to the territories that were part of Austria at the time, and to the those of the Republic of Venice.

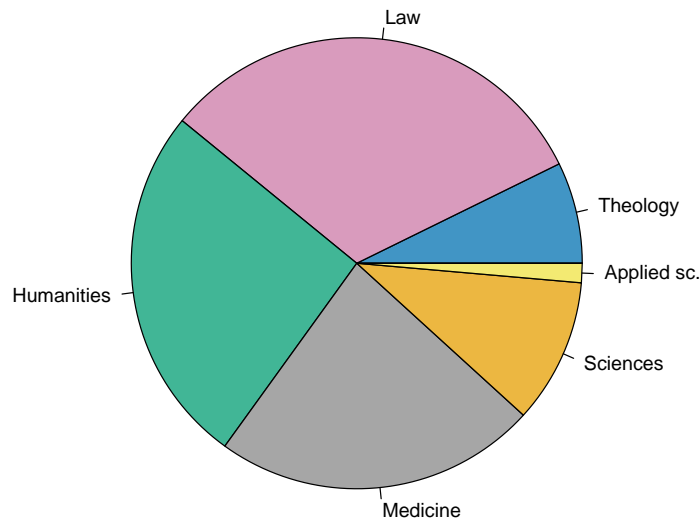


Figure 2: Broad fields at the University of Pavia (published scholars only)

6 HUMAN CAPITAL OF SCHOLARS AND LITERATI

For each person in the database, we compute a heuristic human capital index, identified by combining information from Worldcat and Wikipedia using principal component analysis. The details are given in RETE in volumes 1–5. Figure 4 shows the names of all scholars with a positive human capital index. The vertical green lines (rug plot) show the distribution of all these scholars, including the obscure ones, over time (counting from the beginning of their working life). We can see that many professors with a rather high index taught at the University of Pavia, especially in the last period considered. Two periods of depression also emerge from the figure. The first coincides with the Great Plague of Milan of 1630. The second coincides with strong political instability: the city was under the alternating foreign rule of the Spanish, French, and Austrians. The investment policy implemented by Maria Theresa of Austria marked the revival of the university.

7 TOP 5 PROFESSORS

Agrippa Von Nettesheim (Cologne 1486 – Grenoble 1535) was a physician, astrologer, and philosopher. His eventful life led him to travel throughout Europe. He is considered as the prince of black magic and, despite his ideas, managed to escape the Inquisition. In 1509, he was invited by the University of Dole; in 1515, he became a professor at Pavia, and in 1517, he taught theology in Turin. His major works are: *De occulta philosophia* (1510) and *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum* (1527). The first is a spirited defense of magic, regarded as the most perfect of sciences, the highest philosophy, and the most complete wisdom. His other work is a violent critique of all the sciences of his time, described as a web of errors and absurdities.

Gerolamo Cardano (Pavia 1501– Rome 1576) was a mathematician and physician. He was first offered a teaching position at Pavia in 1536, but did not accept it as it was unpaid. A second offer came in 1543, which he accepted and held, though intermittently, until 1562. For more details, see De la Croix and Vitale (2021).

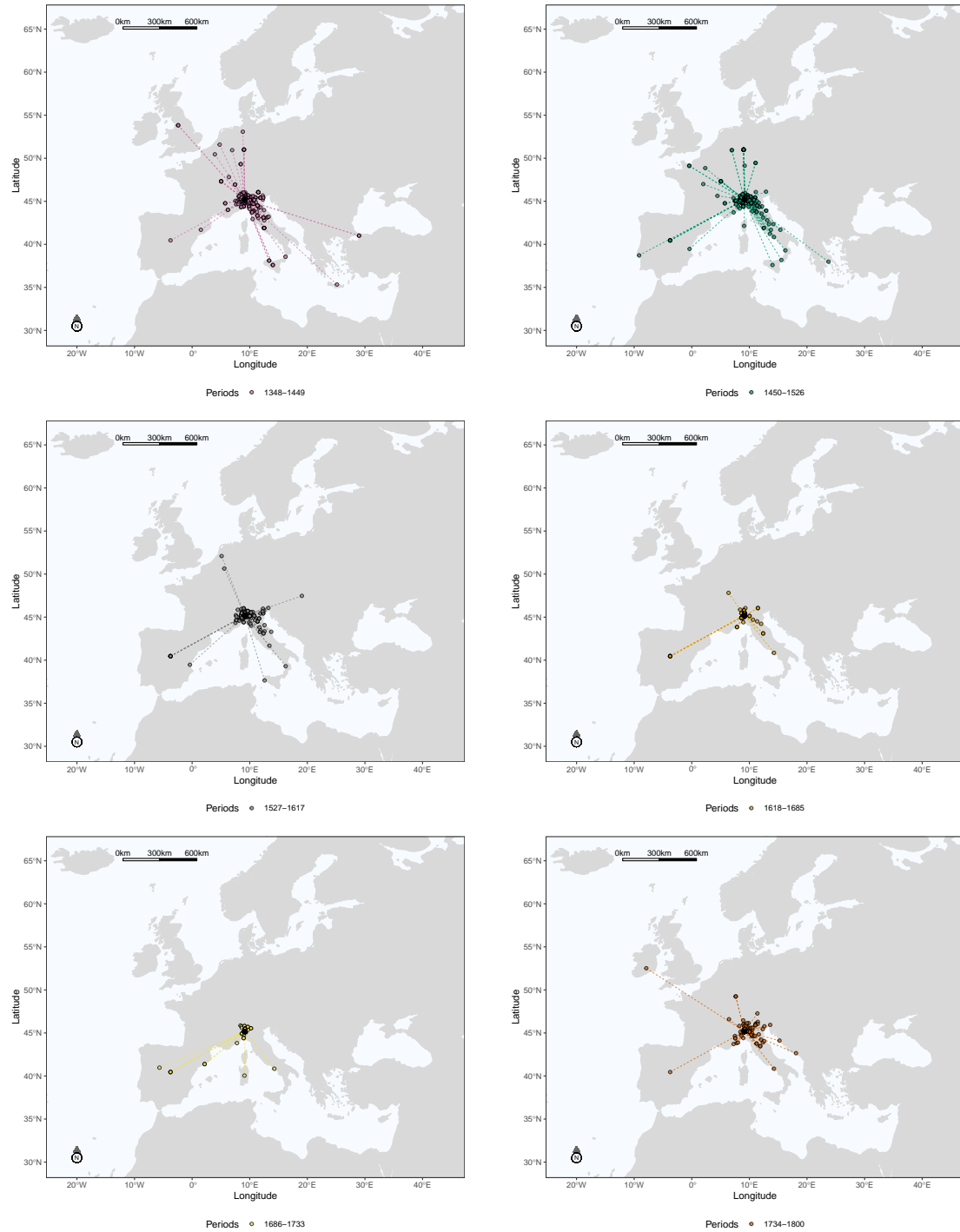


Figure 3: Places of birth of the scholars and literati at the University of Pavia

Lorenzo Valla (Rome 1407 – Rome 1457) was a humanist, classical philologist, and philosopher. He taught eloquence at the University of Pavia, from where he had to leave because of disagreements with the city's jurists. He was an important figure of Italian humanism. For his criticism of the Catholic Church, he is considered a forerunner of Luther.

Michele Ghislieri (Bosco Marengo 1504 – Rome 1572) was a Dominican, who was pope as Pius V from 1566 until his death. He taught philosophy at the University of Pavia, as well as in numerous monasteries of his order. He is considered to be one of the main contributors to the Counter-Reformation.

Alessandro Volta (Como 1745 – Como 1827) was a chemist and a physicist. He studied at the school of Jesuits, where he met Canon Giulio Cesare Gattoni. It was the latter who initiated him into the study of physics and the sciences. Volta became a professor at the University of Pavia in 1771. His lectures were so crowded that Emperor Joseph II ordered the construction of a new "physics theater," today's "Aula Volta." In addition, Volta obtained substantial funding from the emperor to equip the physics cabinet with sophisticated instruments. Volta invented the "capacitor of electricity," the battery, and developed the perpetual electrophorus. He discovered methane. His studies on gases were also significant, leading him to the discovery of the law of the isobaric expansion of air, later extended by Gay Lussac (1778-1850) to all gases, and to important results on vapor pressure.

8 WHO'S WHO ON THE MOON

Another way to measure the notability of individuals is to look for signs of recognition such as street names, names of schools, research institutes, prizes, and lunar crater names. Craters on the moon were named after several professors from the University of Pavia, in recognition of their contribution to the advancement of the sciences. The four professors who were given this honor are Ruggero Giuseppe Boscovich (1711 – 1787) (see Di Caprio and Vitale (2021)), Gerolamo Cardano, Alessandro Volta (see above), and Lazzaro Spallanzani (1745 – 1799) (see Rolla and Zanardello (2022)).

9 FAMILIES OF SCHOLARS

We found 29 father/son pairs who both taught at the University of Pavia, and 6 pairs who taught at different universities. In addition to these data, the number of professors belonging to the same lineage has attracted our attention. This is the case, for example, of the noble Castiglioni family. As for the Milan branch, there are 17 professors. This family was very influential in Milanese political and cultural life. In fact, in addition to numerous scholars, the Castiglioni of Milan boast six saints and a pope. The vastness of the Castiglioni family and the lack of precise data did not allow us to establish all kinship ties. Figure 5 shows a small branch of the family with three scholars in two generations.

10 FINAL THOUGHTS

The University of Pavia was an important university in northern Italy, which was able to compete with neighboring Bologna. What probably prevented it from being like the *Alma Mater* was the form of protectionism, desired by Galeazzo I, whereby professors and students could not leave the university to go to a different one. Another factor that strongly marked the evolution of this university were the plague epidemics, particularly that of 1630, which caused a sharp reduction in the academic population.

11 ANECDOTES

Among the many objects featured in the museum for the history of the University of Pavia, which tells the story of the discoveries made by its distinguished professors, are the head and three fingers

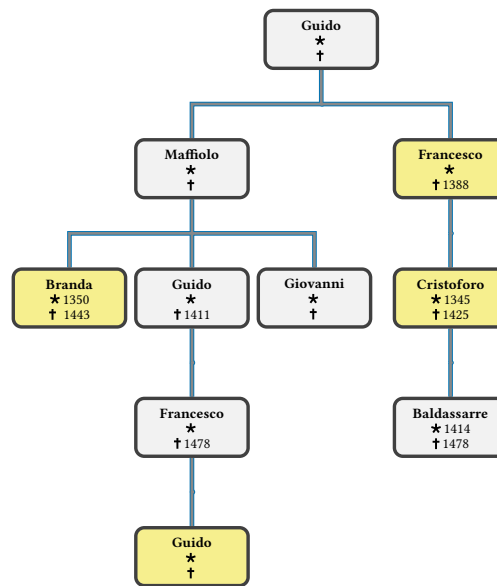


Figure 5: The Castiglioni family

of anatomy professor Antonio Scarpa. Several legends explain the presence of the professor's severed head. It is said that it was his assistant Carlo Beolchini who cut it off, along with three fingers. After showing them to Scarpa's successor, Professor Panizza, the latter said with admiration that a man's greatness was all in his head and that therefore it was right to want to preserve it. Another story says that Scarpa was not well liked by his students and that they wanted to take revenge by mutilating him (Parigi 2004).

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Homepage: <https://perso.uclouvain.be/david.delacroix/uthc.html>

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